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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS UPDATE: RUBERWA IS IN, TSHISEKEDI STILL
OUT

REF: KINSHASA 489

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Vice President Azarias Ruberwa (president of the Rally for Congolese Democracy, RCD) confirmed March 26 that he and his party will take part in upcoming elections, despite previous threats to boycott the remainder of the transition or elections, or both (ref). He told PolCouns that the list of the party's candidates nationwide was finalized over the weekend and will be distributed March 27, enabling RCD candidates to begin registering immediately. Ruberwa said he likely will wait until the end of the extended registration period, on or about April 1, to present his own candidacy for the presidency. He clearly is still hoping for a solution, or at least a face-saving exit, from the dilemma posed by his demand for territorial recognition of the High Plateau area of Minembwe before registering, but is prepared even absent this to go forward with elections.

¶2. (C) On the other hand, UDPS President Etienne Tshisekedi remains adamantly opposed to taking part in elections, despite pleas from many quarters that he do so. PolCouns met March 27 with the party's Secretary-General, Remy Masamba, to explore possible effects on the party of the extension until April 2 for candidates to register. Masamba confirmed that "some" party members (not many, he said) quietly registered as candidates last week, and said that he was himself still considering running for the presidency, particularly in light of Tshisekedi's latest statements. Masamba, who was in the meeting between UNSG Koffi Annan and Tshisekedi, said that he was "shocked" when Tshisekedi bluntly told Annan that he had no intention of "lending credibility" to an illegal electoral process. When Annan asked what he meant by illegal, Tshisekedi replied that since the transition had actually

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ended June 30, 2005, all electoral preparations were simply a sham designed to prevent a new dialog between political players leading to a redistribution of power which would, in turn, enable "genuine" elections to take place at some point. When Annan pointed out that all the other political parties, and indeed scores of independent candidates, seemed satisfied with and supportive of the process, Tshisekedi reportedly replied "that is their problem, not mine."

Comment

¶3. (C) Comment: Ruberwa's decision to take part in elections was not lightly made. He remains strongly and personally committed to what he regards as the principle of territorial

status for Minembwe, and more importantly, representation for the Banyamulenge in the future government. Progress on this issue is, at least temporarily, stalled. Nonetheless, recognizing the very real risk of a rupture in his party should he push for a boycott, and perhaps also tacitly acknowledging that the best way to advance his people's interests is by participating in the system of governance, he has renewed his commitment to elections. Tshisekedi, on the other hand, continues to demonstrate a remarkable lack of political savvy or even personal concern for the political future of his supporters, by insisting on jettisoning a painfully developed electoral process which, while not perfect, certainly offers the Congolese people their first and long-awaited opportunity to choose their own leaders. As for Masamba, he continues to waver, torn between eagerness to seize what he correctly perceives to be a possibly historic opportunity and a very real fear of the possible consequences should Tshisekedi's radical followers turn on him as a traitor. In the end, indecision probably will paralyze him, although others in his party, including his rival Valentin Mbaki, might take matters in their own hands and split from the UDPS. End comment.

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